

Acts 9:1-20

Psalm 30

Revelation 5:11-14

John 21:1-19

## Sermon May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022

### *Easter Is About New Beginnings*

In grade four, we went on a ski trip to Rabbit Hill. I remember spending most of the day on the beginner's hill, as this was the path I was told to stay on, by the ski instructor. Well, as the old saying goes, "curiosity killed the cat."

One of my friends dared me to go down this other path that seemed much more exciting. It was a path that went into the trees (**Image**). So, I started down this path. Well, by the grace of God I made it to the bottom. There were bumps that lifted me into the air. The path was very narrow so I was fortunate not to run into a tree. It was very steep with some turns so I was picking up speed as I tried to turn to stay on the path. Curiosity kills the cat, but a cat has nine lives. I only have one.

I remember reaching the bottom. Dropping to the ground, and lying there for a moment. Figuring out what just happened. Giving myself a good scolding for wandering off the path the instructor invited me to stay on.

Jesus invites us to follow him. To walk down the path he paves for us. The path that leads to God's kingdom come. The path that leads to God's hospitality, forgiveness, healing, and new life.

But, like my ski trip, we sometimes wander off the path we are invited to walk down or ski down. Sometimes we find another path that at first glance seems exciting or we think might lead us to where we want to go. And then we find ourselves at the end of this path shaking our heads. Wondering what we were thinking.

For Peter, and some of the disciples, they have wandered off the path Jesus invited them to walk down. They have returned to the boat to fish for a living (**Image**). Instead, of continuing to do Christ's work in the world.

Why? We might ask. Well, for Peter, and for the disciples, they question their faith when Jesus is crucified. They wonder if this path Jesus was leading them down will actually lead to God's hospitality, forgiveness, healing, and new life for their lives and for their community. They are afraid that this path will only lead to their own crucifixion. And even though they have had an experience or two of the resurrected Christ according to John's gospel, it hasn't sunk in yet. They have chosen to return to their former life. Instead of taking the risk of continuing down the path Jesus has paved for them.

For Peter himself, he denied Jesus three times when trying to walk the path Jesus walked. I wouldn't be surprised if he doubted himself as much as he doubted his faith. I wouldn't be surprised if his guilt has turned to shame. Making it harder for him to see that he can walk down the path Jesus paves for him.

Like Peter, there are times in our lives where we question our faith. Where we wander off the path Jesus invites us to walk down. The path Jesus paves for us. For example, dealing with an illness or condition that debilitates us or even threatens our life can be hard. Jesus invites us to walk down a path that leads to God's healing and new life. But it is hard to trust in this promise. It is hard to continue to walk down this path with hope, when we keep dealing with the illness or condition despite trying many different medications and natural treatment options.

I think of the movie "My Life" where Michael Keaton plays Bob Jones. In this one part of the movie, Bob's oncologist tells him there is nothing more they can do to stop the cancer from spreading. His wife Gail who is played by Nicole Kidman, convinces him to go see someone named Mr. Ho who practices a more natural form of healing. When Mr. Ho asks Bob if he believes in miracles. Bob says "I will if this works".

It is hard to trust in God's promise of healing and new life when we are dealing with a chronic or terminal illness (**Image**). It is hard to keep walking down this path if we don't even see a glimpse of healing or something new.

Another example I can think of is when dealing with the death of a loved one. Grief often leads us to question our faith. To ask God why? We struggle to stay on the path, because we struggle to see the new life God promises us when death is staring us down.

I can think of many other examples of events in our lives that make it hard for us to stay on the path. Like dealing with a break up or a job loss or financial crisis or an addiction or a natural disaster or a pandemic or a war. There are many events in life that have us question our faith. Have us wondering where God is present in all of this. Wondering if the path God invites us to walk down is a path that leads to hospitality, forgiveness, healing, and new life.

Well, in response to Peter's doubt. In response to Peter's denial. Jesus forgives Peter. Not once, but three times. Jesus then invites Peter, and the others with him to come back to the path. To give up fishing, and continue Christ's work. To believe that if they continue to walk down the path Jesus has paved for them, they will experience God's hospitality, forgiveness, healing, and new life.

Throughout the book of Acts, we see that the disciple's choice to find their way back to the path Jesus paved for them leads to them experiencing God's hospitality, forgiveness, healing, and new life.

Today, we are journeying through the Easter season. A season of new beginnings. A season that coincides with spring. Where the death of winter gives way to the sprouting of new life (**Image**). Easter is a season that gives us hope that Jesus breaks into our lives in the midst of our suffering, and invites us back on the path he is walking. The path he paved for us.

Easter is a season where we are invited to trust in his love for us. To believe that if we continue on this path, then like the disciples, we too will experience God's hospitality, forgiveness, healing, and new life. We too will go from the cross to the empty tomb to the beach where the resurrected Christ meets us (**Image**). Eats with us. Forgives us. Renews us. Sends us forth with good news to proclaim.

For Peter, he is now empowered through Christ's act of forgiveness and renewal to walk the path Jesus walked. Continuing Christ's work in the world. So that others can experience Christ's hospitality, forgiveness, healing, and new life.

For Paul, who was confronted by the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, he is now empowered through Christ's act of forgiveness and renewal to walk the path Jesus walked. Continuing Christ's work in the Gentile world. So that others can experience Christ's hospitality, forgiveness, healing, and new life.

For us, we are empowered through Christ's act of forgiveness and renewal to continue Christ's work in the world. So that others can experience Christ's hospitality, forgiveness, healing, and new life.

Let us pray, gracious God, thank you for not giving up on us even when we sometimes give up on you. When we wander off the path you have paved for us, empower us through the resurrected Christ to find our way back. So that we can continue your Son's work in the world. Experiencing your hospitality, forgiveness, healing, and new life in our lives and in our community. **Amen.**

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